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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8957
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 8629
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 1086
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RUEHKS0/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 1655
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3438
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
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SUBJECT: JAPAN PLUGS FOOD SECURITY AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN
THE MEDIA

11. (SBU) Despite cuts in the Japanese government's overall budget, politicians recently approved an additional 1.7 billion yen (\$17 million) for the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) to promote food-related "self-sufficiency strategic public relations." Using full page advertisements in major newspapers, MAFF launched the "Food Action Nippon" campaign October 6, which aims at getting the Japanese public to "share their concerns about imports and take specific action to raise self-sufficiency." The program includes a social networking website (<http://www.syokuryo.jp>), which lists celebrity supporters ranging from actors and chefs to Olympic athletes. Companies are encouraged to submit on-line applications to use the Food Action Nippon campaign logo in their own public relations and advertising activities.

12. (SBU) In similar fashion, state-funded NHK Television in October ran two, one-hour specials cautioning viewers about the risks of becoming overly dependent on food imports, especially from the United States. The documentary claims the USG and U.S. industry have collaborated in a decade-long conspiracy to make Japan more import-dependent. The program also casts U.S. grain suppliers as greedy and unreliable.

Why Self-Sufficiency Won't Bring Security

13. (SBU) Japanese interest groups and politicians have said the country is over-reliant on imports and depict the situation as detrimental to the country's strategic interests. For many years, these groups have sought to increase domestic food production as the best way to ensure its food security. However, geographic and demographic constraints, as well as changes in consumption patterns away from rice, mean Japan must continue to rely on imports to feed its people. Japan is a mountainous country where the average farm size is only about 1/100th the size of a U.S. farm. Seventy percent of Japanese farmers are over the age of 60 and the bulk of their income comes from non-farm activities. Japan's food self-sufficiency on a calorie basis has fallen from 73 percent in 1960 to less than 40 percent today, and there is little the Japanese government realistically can do to reverse this trend.

14. (SBU) The call for greater food self sufficiency receives strong support from more obvious constituents such as farmers.

However, even Japanese consumers seldom complain publicly about high import duties and high prices for food that result from such policies. In a poll released November 16 by the Cabinet Office, 89 percent of respondents indicated they would choose domestic food products over imports (up seven percent from a survey conducted in 2000), with safety concerns topping the list of reasons for doing so. Japan's major political parties -- the LDP and the DPJ -- rely on protectionist tools to win rural votes and both advocate enhanced food self-sufficiency goals. The Ministry of Agriculture recently established a goal to achieve 50 percent self-sufficiency in agriculture by 2015.

SCHIEFFER